

# HARVARD

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



### Email Best Practices

Broadcast email can be a very powerful marketing tool for Harvard Clubs and Shared Interest Groups. Here are some basic email marketing tips to help you make the most of your communications.

#### **When to Send**

Statistics show that emails with the best open rates are generally sent Tuesday–Thursday, so try to shoot for mid-week when you really need to get your message out. Weekends are not an optimal time; your email can get buried in spam and personal communications.

#### **Frequency**

The number one rule of email broadcasting is to respect your reader’s frequency preferences. Spamming your audience and ignoring their content desires results in opt-outs, and winning back opt-outs is a difficult task. If you have several communications in the near future, think about how you may combine them to avoid excessive emailing.

#### **Content**

The meat and potatoes of your message should be as clear and error-free as possible. Place the most relevant information at the very top of the message. If you have multiple events to promote, start with the most recent first and work your way down.

Brevity is best. If readers open a novel they won’t make it past the first word. Try to keep content to a minimum for a quick read and use visual cues (images, bullets, bold) to move the reader’s eye down the page.

\*Again be mindful of Spam trigger words, exclamation points, etc.

#### **Subject Line**

A targeted subject line can mean the difference between your readers opening or deleting your message. Write a brief subject line that accurately represents the message’s major content. Try to shoot for six words or less and make every word count.

\*Exclamation points and using all capital letters in subject lines trigger spam filters. Do not use them. Certain words also trigger spam filters as well. Examples: *\$\$, 100% free, Act Now, Amazing stuff, Apply now, Free membership, Leave, Limited time offer, Opportunity, Order Now, Promise you.*

#### **Editing**

Take the time to proofread your work. Email users are turned off by unprofessional content full of typos. Errors do not create a positive brand image.

## **Links**

Including links gives readers with email problems the opportunity to access the information in another way. Links also add to the dynamic nature of email messages and can make registering for an event much easier for users.

## **Testing**

Before you send the email, try sending a test message to yourself and a few co-workers. This critical step can save you from embarrassing errors or a jumbled layout. The email broadcast tool may render your content in a way you hadn't expected. Testing can ensure that your message gets out the way you intended it to.

## **Open Rates**

The "Open rate" number is how many people on an email list opened (or viewed) a particular email. If you are getting an open rate between 20–30% you are among the average. Very few lists, if any, are getting much above 50% open rates from normal email campaigns. Your list may have some specific factors that give you higher rates. However, don't expect to be getting 80% open rates. People are too busy, inboxes are too full and the measurements are technically limited.

## **Click Through Rates**

Click through rates tell you how many people are actually reading your content or taking the action you have intended. It is a true measure of the success of your email. Click through rates may suffer for many reasons but these are among the most important:

- Irrelevant, confusing, or just too much content: Have you properly segmented your target audience? Is your content clear and compelling without errors? Is your call to action and purpose within the first paragraph?
- Links are not prominent: If your links are too hard to find no one will click them. Email readers will typically scan the first paragraph, maybe two, to find out what they are supposed to "do" as a result of the email.
- Over communication or duplicate messaging: Have you sent the same message before, has your audience already heard from you or from Harvard already today or this week? Our audiences are busy people and are far more likely to respond in a positive way if we respect their time (and inboxes). In the email world, less is more. Over communicating will not only lead to low click through rates, but worst of all, opt-outs can increase (refer to the Frequency section below).

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